

INFORMATION REPORT

DATE DISTR. 2 February 1948

NO. OF PAGES 2

25X1

NO. OF ENCLS. J.
(LISTED BELOW)

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the Vorkuta region is a second Don basin as far as coal is concerned. The coal from this region is sent to all the heavy industries in the USSR. Exploitation began in 1930, and coal used to be transported by river until 1943, when the railroad was completed. Vorkuta coal is practically pure anthracite, and the mines are not deep. When I was there they kept the railroad open all year; even in the winter they would run 15 to 20 trains daily from Vorkuta to Pechora, each train with 1,500 to 2,000 tons of coal. I heard from a prisoner who used to work there that even this amount of coal was not all Vorkuta produced. They had a surplus which they could not ship. The prisoner estimated that there was enough coal in Vorkuta to supply all of Russia for the next 100 or 150 years.

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the mines were well mechanized. This is not surprising if one considers that all equipment produced in Russia was at the call of the labor camps, which got first choice of everything.

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In 1945 they discovered a new territory in Khatanga, about 70 km from Verkhaya, which is even more important than Verkhaya. The railroad to Khatanga was started in the spring of 1945 but it was not finished [redacted] in 1947. At Khatanga the weather was terrible and the ground was all tundra. People cannot stand it [redacted]

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[redacted] at Kholmorye the coal is mined on the surface and is as good as Vorkuta coal. Also, there is coal at Khamovoy and in 1941 there was a plan to build a railroad from there to Khabarov. A veterinarian, a free man, told me that construction of this road was stopped in the winter of 1941-42.

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There was a mine at Koshin, 140 km from Koshva on the Pechora-Vorkuta railroad. And every year geologists used to be sent into the Urals, starting from Abex, to prospect for new fields. There would be 10 to 15 geologists, but they never had enough equipment and supplies to get much result. [redacted] they found oil and radium along the Izma river.

25X1 Pechora-Vorkuta Railroad

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The distance from Koshva, on the Pechora river, to Vorkuta is 486 km. [redacted] the type of locomotives, but the freight cars are either of box or half-car type and are mostly four-axle. There are a few two-axle cars. The number of trains daily varied from four to 16, depending on the weather. Bridges, repair shops, locomotive depots, water towers, and other buildings are almost completely standardized in construction and capacity. The buildings are nearly all wooden. The bridges are all made of reinforced concrete. The water supply all along the way is from gravity tanks. [redacted] these are heated internally, because they are not insulated. They run a passenger train every other day.

The railroad station on the Pechora river is at Koshva, a town of two thousand. On the third km there is a railroad bridge, reinforced concrete, between 1,000 and 1,200 meters long, and high enough for barges to pass under. On the eighth km there is a wooden railroad station called Pechora. It has passenger waiting accommodations, a locomotive depot, and repair shops, probably for minor repair work only. Pechora has seven or eight station tracks which are frequently loaded to capacity with coal trains going south. On the 66th km the railroad crosses the river Sinya on a reinforced concrete bridge about 300 m long. Before approaching the bridge, there is a small station called Kamlavoy, with no facilities of any kind. On the 110th km there is a larger station, Kas-Yu. It has a locomotive depot, water supply, a number of barracks for employees and prisoners, but no repair facilities. One mile beyond this station a bridge 500 to 600 m long crosses the river Kas-Yu. On the 142nd km there is another bridge from 400 to 600 m long over the river Koshin. On the 145th km there is a station, Koshin, which is of medium size and has five sidings and a water supply.

On the 166th km there is a 200 to 250 meter bridge over the river Chernaya. On the 190th km there is a medium-sized station called Inta, which has a water supply. From Inta there is a spur of 15 km northwest to a coal mining village called Intlag. On the 191st km the railroad crosses the river Inta, which is approximately 350 m wide. On the 222nd km there is a large station, Kochmen, with a large locomotive depot for five to six locomotives. It also has a water supply and repair shops. There are six or seven sidings in front of the station. The locomotive depot itself is about one km north of the station.

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At the 240th km there is a small station, Ashpez, which has water supply. On the 242nd km there is a bridge about 300 m long over the river Kochmes. On the 288th km there is a bridge approximately 800 m long over the river Usa. On the 290th km there is a small station, Abez, which is not important to the railroad, but is the administrative center for concentration camps of the area. On the 346th km a large station, Sivaya Maska, has a locomotive depot and small repair shops. They are about one km south of the station. The water supply is directly at the station, which has six or seven sidings. At the 424th km is Khanovy, which has only a water supply and four or five sidings. The last station is Vorkuta, at the 486th km.

it has large locomotive depots and big repair shops.

Formerly they used this spur line to ship coal to Ust-Yorkuta, where the coal was put on barges and shipped down the Usa river to the Pechora river. But this spur line is not important now. Since the Pechora-Yorkuta railroad was completed in 1943 most coal movements are by train.

Every train has two locomotives and they go very fast, 50 or 60 km per hour. The passenger trains are especially fast. They take only 22 hours for the 486 km. The trains run through all kinds of weather. There are many fogs and heavy storms, but the engineers just take an extra drink of vodka and go through.

The traffic southbound consisted entirely of Vorkuta coal. Northbound traffic is approximately 60% empties and the balance is lumber, provisions for inhabitants and prisoners, and prisoners themselves. The prisoners are carried in converted box cars, 72 persons to a four-axle car and 36 to a two-axle car. They have community bunks and a stove in the middle. The cars look like a hastily converted job. Some of these prisoners are brought from the Far East, which takes as long as two months. Every day 1,000 or 1,200 prisoners would arrive. Generally the number of sidings at the stations is much more than they ordinarily need. This is because they need a reserve for trains which must await favorable weather to proceed.

The rails themselves are approximately four inches tall. [Probably the II-A or III-A type.] The switches are of what is known as the American type. The ballast is a mixture of gravel and sand. The ties are soaked from the top with petroleum residue. [Probably either final or pre-final residue.]

It is a wide gauge track, and when they receive locomotives from Germany, as they did in the last two years, they changed the locomotives to the wider track.

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They were large shops and well equipped. The shop in Pechora employed about 600 to 600 people and the other ones were only slightly smaller.

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Between Kozhva and Vorkuta the tundra is very bad for railroad construction. The region is swampy and becomes impassable during warm periods. In 1942 and 1943 we had many accidents, especially on the big curves. In 1944 they began to liquidate these "S" curves.

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At first the primary desire of the authorities was to complete the railroad at the expense of good engineering. Because of lack of adequate material, chiefly iron and cement and other equipment, it was impossible to build a round roadbed. Numerous curves were built to go around marshy ground. In 1944 and 1945 materials were received which made possible the construction of piles across marshy ground and the elimination of many curves. In 1947 the railroad was considered perfected and it was transferred to the Ministry of Ways of Communications.

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The steel and cement were brought in from the interior of Russia, at first by river barges and later by the railroad. Most of the wood came from the camp site. It was processed at a large mill on the Pechora river. The head of this mill was responsible to the camp commander.

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Gravel was taken out of glacial surface deposits of gravel and stones. It was taken out by train on temporary spur lines, and used as supporting material for the piles along the roadbed. The main gravel deposits used were located at 145, 222, and 285 kms. The stone for construction of the bridges was taken out of a place 15 kms southeast of Kozhim railroad station. This camp was liquidated after completion of the bridges. They are now getting stone between 45 and 60 kms, at a large special permanent camp.

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Actually the road was completed in 1943 and used, but not under the Ministry of Communications. In the winter of 1944 and 1945, new construction was begun from Khatymy to Vorkuta. In the spring of 1944 they had started the improvement of the road -- the elimination of curves.

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They have special crews that remove snow in winter and repair and maintain the railroad during the year. These brigades live along the railroad in small camps.

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There were two guards on every bridge, and they had special guards to check your papers every 50 km on the train. This is restricted territory, and only the workers who belong here can pass. If somebody from Moscow wanted to go through he had to get permission.

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There are two main bridges, the destruction of which would put this whole northern region out of action. One is the bridge over the Pechora river, about two km from Kozhva. It is about 1,200 m long and is used only by the railroad; there is no road. In the winter the road runs over the ice, and in the summer they use ferries. There is another important bridge over the river Usa, about 700 to 800 m long and eight m wide. It has one railroad track and room on each side for people on foot. People must have permission to walk across this bridge.

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the 1501st Construction Company men used to talk about working on a railroad that ran 800 km from Kaisher to Komsomolsk. In 1944 many workers from the Pechora camp were sent to this new construction. They took along two veterinarians to check up on the condition of horses there, and these veterinarians returned and told me about it.

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Before the war they planned to build a railroad from Vorkuta to Yugusha, but I don't know too much about it. Under the new Five Year Plan they are talking about double-tracking the railroad all the way from Vorkuta to Kotlas.

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They are all dairy farms and the principal products are butter and meat, which are sent to the cities. Eight km southwest from Medvezhka, along the west bank, is a large dairy farm called Skedrovashir. This dairy farm belongs to Inta prisoner camp. Here they have about 800 cows and 300-400 hectares of cultivated areas. Eighteen km from Medvezhka on the east bank is Konetabor, a village of about four houses, and here is located the administrative center of a few collective farms. Five km from Konetabor is Aranets, a little village of about 15 houses and the nearest place to the Urals. Russian geological expeditions usually stay here en route to the Urals. Seven km from Aranets on the west bank is Respublika. This is the best crossing point across the Vachorn river. Care must be used along here to avoid the Byleya river, a left-bank tributary. It is very swampy and horses can't go through it. Respublika is supposed to have the richest kolkhoz in the area.

About five km south is located Danilovka, a village of about 35 houses, and about five km southeast is located Kamenka. About 21 km from Kamenka is Taralka, and 12 km from Karalka is Voya, with about 800 people, all Russian settlers. They were all exiled during the collectivization period of 1929-33. Most came from Voronezh and the Kuban region. They were not prisoners, but were controlled by the MVD and their return to Russia was prohibited. Most worked in a factory producing grindstones. The factory was a co-operative belonging to the rayon executive committee, Rayspolkom. There was also a collective farm of about 150 hectares of cultivated area with 200 cows and 40 horses about 6 km west of Voya. Petroleum test wells were sunk in 1934, but no oil was found. About 11 km from Voya is Soplyask. This was a fueling station for wood-burning river craft. About 13 km from Soplyask is Shehugor. About 25 houses are here. About 24 km from Shehugor, along the Shehugor river, is located Misha-Bichevnik. This is a small fishing collective of about 10 homes. During the war people here refused to go to the army and ran away to the Urals, where they were arrested. About 70 km from Shehugor is Yedzhid-Kyrt. This is in the coal-mining territory.

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Road Transport

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25X1 Overland transportation in summer was very hard -- the only possible routes were along river banks, since inland areas were swamps. However, travel along the rivers was hard because of many small tributaries which drained into the larger rivers. These were narrow and deep. In the spring floods made the tributaries into torrents. The only safe place to cross them was at their mouths. Farther up, the channels are narrow and deep, with steep walls. Sometimes these little rivers were only one, two, or three m deep. It was the steepness of the banks that made them hard to cross.

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25X1 Mostly tractors. Travel by horseback is possible, but it is difficult because the snow is two or three m deep and slushy.

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25X1 Caterpillar. [redacted] two American tractors which were very good. [redacted] used them to clean the roads. They were generally more durable than the Russian tractors. In 1948 the American tractors were taken to Tayshet. At Khalmalyu tractors were used almost exclusively for construction because snow was a serious problem, too much for horses to cope with. One tractor did about as much work as 100 horses.

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The snow disappeared by June. Sometimes it snowed in June, but not a permanent snow. In July and August it was summer and it rained very often. In September we again had snow. From 1 May to 1 August it was light all 24 hours.

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The road was constructed in 1920-21 for use by trucks in the construction of the railroad. It was a corduroy road, a timber road. As a section of railroad was completed, the road was taken out. The timber in the road was used for firewood. There are still remnants of the road scattered here and there, but it is no longer in use.

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At Medvezhka, on the Pechora river, there starts a road that is used only in the winter. It runs through the forest to Skodrasyn, about 100 km. The road follows the Oronets river for 25 km and then turns eastward to Skodrasyn.

Airfields

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There used to be an emergency landing field at Koshim, but there were no buildings -- just a field. There would be good places to land on the birch collective farm near Shchugor, and on some of the other dairy farms, because the ground already has been cleared.

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Enclosures

Map of Pechora-Vorkuta Railroad,
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